

## **Corps and Louisiana Agree on Near Term Focus for Coastal Restoration**

The Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) announced that the State of Louisiana and the Army Corps of Engineers have reached agreement on a set of principles to guide the completion of a Near-term Plan for Coastal Ecosystem Restoration.

The Near-term Plan will serve as a framework for identifying the highest priority, most promising coastal restoration projects in Louisiana in order to accelerate their design and implementation.

The plan will focus on the best opportunities for restoration in the near-term given the present state of knowledge, on the best ways to sequence that work, and on the best ways to evaluate success. The Plan will guide the research and planning efforts that are needed to determine and support the future long-term needs of coastal Louisiana restoration.

Army Assistant Secretary John Paul Woodley, Jr. commended Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and her predecessor, Governor Mike Foster and members of the Louisiana Congressional delegation for their "determined and persistent leadership in forging a cooperative alliance that has enabled federal and state officials to come to agreement on this significant policy guidance."

"I am confident that by continuing to work together the federal agencies and the State will produce a near-term plan that will stand the test of rigorous scrutiny as to environmental and economic benefits, so that resources are allocated wisely," said Woodley.

The Near-term Plan will build upon progress made under the 1990 Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act and will guide the next phase of the restoration effort. The Administration has already recommended a major increase in efforts under the 1990 Act to build and evaluate highly cost-effective fresh-water and sediment diversion projects. The Administration has proposed to nearly double the funds spent in that program in 2003, to \$95 million in 2004 and \$84 million in 2005. The President's fiscal year 2005 budget includes \$8 million to continue work on the Near-term Plan and for studies of potentially promising long-term coastal restoration concepts, an increase of \$5.5 million from the previous year.

"Coastal Louisiana is a resource of national significance," said James L. Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. "President Bush believes that we can make great progress on coastal wetlands restoration in a fiscally responsible way by using the best available science and sound management principles."

The plan, once finalized, is intended to guide how projects will be identified, prioritized, sequenced and budgeted over the next 10 years. Research and preparation of a plan have been underway for two years. This agreement will focus planning efforts on the parts of the ecosystem that require the most immediate attention and will propose to address these needs through features that provide the highest return in net environmental and economic benefits per dollar cost. The Corps and the State are working to produce a draft near-term plan for public comment in July 2004.

The Corps and the State agreed that their respective specialists would produce for public comment a draft Near-term Plan that will:

- Identify the most critical ecological needs of the coastal area;
- Present and evaluate conceptual alternatives for meeting the most critical ecological needs;
- Identify the kinds of restoration features that could be implemented in the near-term that address the most critical ecological needs, and propose to address these needs through features that provide the highest return in net benefits per dollar of cost;
- Establish priorities among the identified near-term restoration features;
- Describe a process by which the identified near-term restoration features could be implemented;
- Identify the key scientific uncertainties and engineering challenges facing the effort to protect and restore the ecosystem, and propose a strategy for resolving them;
- Identify, assess and, if appropriate, recommend feasibility studies that should be undertaken over the next 10 years to fully explore other potentially promising large-scale restoration options; and
- Present a strategy for addressing the long-term needs of coastal Louisiana restoration beyond the 10-year focus of the Near-term Plan.

The plan is expected to guide further development of federal and state policies, and recommend the continuing development of the science, feasibility studies, design and engineering necessary for construction of specific projects and features to accomplish coastal restoration over the next 10 years.